

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY RABAT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 662
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMCONSUL CASABLANCA
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMCONSUL TANGIER
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
AMEMBASSY TUNIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 RABAT 0052

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT MO
SUBJECT: STATUS OF MOROCCAN ELECTORAL PROCESS

REF: 76 RABAT 6192

1. SUMMARY: THE OPPOSITION PARTIES CONTINUE TO CHARGE THE GOVERNMENT WITH IRREGULARITIES IN THE NOVEMBER 12 LOCAL ELECTIONS; WITH MANIPULATION OF THE RESULTS; AND WITH PUBLISHING SELECTED STATISTICS. THE OPPOSITION DID WELL IN URBAN CENTERS, WHILE THE PRO-GOVERNMENT "INDEPENDENTS" DOMINATED THE COUNTRYSIDE. OPPOSITION PARTIES PLAN TO CONTINUE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS IN HOPES OF PROGRESS TOWARD THE DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS STIPULATED BY THE CONSTITUTION. THE NEXT STEP IS ELECTIONS TO PROFESSIONAL COUNCILS, TO BE FOLLOWED IN MARCH OR EARLY APRIL BY DIRECT ELECTION OF TWO-THIRDS OF A NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, THE OTHER THIRD TO BE CHOSEN INDIRECTLY BY LOCAL AND PROFESSIONAL

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COUNCILS. THE "INDEPENDENTS" AND THE PRO-GOVERNMENT RIGHTIST PARTIES SHOULD DO WELL IN THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, AS SEATS WILL AGAIN BE HEAVILY WEIGHTED IN FAVOR OF RURAL AREAS. HOWEVER, THE BROADER CONTEXT OF NATIONAL ISSUES MAY HELP THE OPPOSITION PARTIES IMPROVE THEIR SHOWING. END SUMMARY

2. MORE ELECTION RESULTS ANNOUNCED. ON DEC. 2, THE MINISTRY OF

INTERIOR RELEASED ADDITIONAL SELECTED STATISTICS ON THE RESULTS OF THE NOV. 12 POLLING FOR RURAL AND MUNICIPAL COUNCILS (SEE REFTEL FOR RESULTS ANNOUNCED INITIALLY). TOTAL VOTES WON BY INDEPENDENTS AND THE PARTIES WERE ROUGHLY IN PROPORTION TO THE PERCENTAGE OF SEATS EACH GROUP HAD ALREADY BEEN ANNOUNCED AS WINNING. MOST NOTICEABLE SLIPPAGE WAS IN THE RELATIVE POSITION OF THE INDEPENDENTS (TO 59 PCT OF THE VOTES COMPARED WITH 64 PCT OF THE SEATS), A REFLECTION OF THE RELATIVELY HEAVY WEIGHTING OF THE LESS POPULATED RURAL ELECTORAL DISTRICTS, WHERE MUCH OF THE INDEPENDENT SOCRE WAS MARKED UP. THE POPULAR VOTE WON BY THE OPPOSITION REPRESENTED A LARGER PERCENTAGE THAN THAT OF SEATS WON. OTHER STATISTICS SHOWED THAT 42 PCT OF THOSE ELECTED ARE ILLITERATE, AN IMPROVEMENT OVER FORMER COUNCILS INDEPENDENTS WERE ELECTED AS PRESIDENTS BY OVER 74 PCT OF THE LOCAL COUNCILS, AGAIN PREDOMINANTLY IN RURAL AREAS. ISTIQLAL AND SOCIALIST UNION OF POPULAR FORCES (USFP), HOWEVER, WON CONTROL OF NEARLY EVERY MAJOR URBAN COUNCIL.

3. ISTIQLAL, USFP, AND PARTY OF PROGRESS AND SOCIALISM (PPS - COMMUNIST) WERE QUICK TO ATTACK THE LATEST GOVERNMENT FIGURES, IN KEEPING WITH CONSTANT CRITICISM OF GOVERNMENT HANDLING OF THE ELECTIONS SINCE ELECTION DAY. FOREMOST AMONG CHARGES WAS THAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS WITHHOLDING COMPLETE STATISTICS IN ORDER TO ALTER THE VOTE AT THE EXPENSE OF OPPOSITION CANDIDATES AND IN FAVOR OF "INDEPENDENTS." THE GOVERNMENT WAS ALSO ACCUSED OF HAVING EXERTED PRESSURES ON ELECTED COUNCIL MEMBERS TO CHOOSE "INDEPENDENT" COUNCIL PRESIDENTS AND ASSIMILATING MANY SUCCESSFUL OPPOSITION CANDIDATES INTO THE "INDEPENDENT" LEDGER IN ORDER TO MAGNIFY THAT GROUPING. USFP, FOR EXAMPLE, CLAIMED THAT IT WAS CREDITED WITH CONFIDENTIAL

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ONLY HALF OF ITS TRUE SUCCESSES, AND THAT AN "ACCURATE" COUNT WOULD HAVE SHOWN THAT IT HAD WON OVER 17 PCT OF LOCAL COUNCIL SEATS. ISTIQLAL ALSO CLAIMED THE GOVERNMENT'S FIGURES HAD HALVED ITS REAL GAINS, WHICH SOME PARTY SOURCES PLACED AS HIGH AS 35 PCT OF TOTAL SEATS. COMMUNIST PPS CHARGED THE GOVERNMENT WITH HARASSMENTS AND IRREGULARITIES, BUT MANAGED TO OBTAIN A SURPRISING 38,389 BALLOTS, PRIMARILY IN CASABLANCA AND OTHER URBAN CENTERS. NATIONAL UNION OF POPULAR FORCES (NFP), WHICH HAD WITHDRAWN FROM COMPETITION, CITED THE 35 PCT NATIONWIDE ABSTENTION (45PCT IN CASABLANCA) AS JUSTIFICATION FOR ITS WITHDRAWAL, MAINTAINING THAT THE POPULATION AT LARGE SHARED THE BELIEF THAT THE EXERCISE WAS FUTILE. THE PARTIES OF THE RIGHT WERE, FOR THE MOST PART, CONTENT WITH THE RESULTS AND SEEMED TO BE MOVING TOWARD CASTING THEIR LOT WITH THE INDEPENDENTS. THE ONE EXCEPTION, AT LEAST FOR THE MOMENT, HAS BEEN POPULAR DEMOCRATIC AND CONSTITUTIONAL MOVEMENT (MPCD). ITS LEADER, DR. ABDELKRIM KHATIB, IS REPORTEDLY ANGRY WITH THE PALACE OVER HAVING BEEN EDGED OUT OF THE PRESIDENCY OF THE EL JADIDA MUNICIPAL COUNCIL BY A CABINET LEVEL OFFICIAL, ARSALAN JADIDI.

4. INCIDENTS. FOLLOWING ORDERLY BALLOTTING ON NOVEMBER 12, TWO OF THE MORE SERIOUS POST-ELECTION INCIDENTS OCCURRED IN MARRAKECH AND IN A RURAL COMMUNITY NEAR OUJDA, BENI MATHAR. IN MARRAKECH, WHERE ISTIQLAL AND USFP HAD WON AN ABOSLUTE MAJORITY OF THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL, A GOVERNMENT-OPPOSITION STRUGGLE ENSUED DURING WHICH THE GOVERNOR WAS ALLEGED TO HAVE ATTEMPTED TO INSTALL A PRO-GOVERNMENT CANDIDATE, CABINET MEMBER ABDELLAH GHARNIT, AS PRESIDENT. DESPITE THE SIT-INS, JAILINGS, AND THREATS BY AUTHORITIES CHARGED BY THE OPPOSITION, THE MAJORITY COALITION HELD TOGETHER AND AN ISTIQLALI WAS FINALLY ELECTED PRESIDENT. IN BENI MATHAR, AN ISTIQLALI DEMONSTRATION OVER ALLEGED GOVERNMENT PRESSURES ERUPTED INTO VIOLENCE AND THREE PERSONS WERE SHOT TO DEATH BY LAW OFFICERS. THE GOVERNMENT ISSUED A COMMUNIQUE CITING THE "INFLAMMATORY RHETORIC" OF THE PARTIES, AND SEVERAL ISTIQLALIS WERE TRIED AND SENTENCED OVER THE EPISODE. TO DATE THIS HAS NOT BECOME A NATIONAL ISSUE.

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INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

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5. OPPOSITION ATTITUDE TOWARD FUTURE. DESPITE OPPOSITION COMPLAINTS, THE PARTIES SEEM TO BE FULLY ENGAGED IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS, VIEWING IT AS THEIR FIRST SUCH CHANCE IN MANY YEARS AND AS AN INITIAL STEP IN LONG-AWAITED INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF POWER SHARING. OPPOSITION LEADERS HAVE PRIVATELY CONFIRMED TO US THE INTENTION TO CONTINUE PARTICIPATION UNDER PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES. ISTIQLAL AND USFP, MEANWHILE, ARE PLEASED AT HAVING REGISTERED STRONGLY IN THE URBAN AREAS AND, THEY CLAIM, RURAL AREAS. OF THE 21 COMMUNES SURPASSING 50,000 INHABITANTS, THEY WON CONTROL OF 16, INCLUDING CASABLANCA, RABAT, FES, MARRAKECH, AND MEKNES. IN SOME LOCALES, SUCH AS MARRAKECH, ISTIQLAL-USFP COOPERATION HELD UP; IN OTHERS, SUCH AS FES, IT BROKE DOWN. THERE IS AT THE MOMENT A STRAIN BETWEEN THESE TWO PARTIES WHICH, IF IT REMAINS UNHEALED, COULD WEAKEN THE OPPOSITION VIS-A-VIS THE PALACE IN COMING STAGES.

6. CURRENT PLAY. FOLLOWING A BURST OF SPECULATION IMMEDIATELY AFTER NOV. 12, THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE RECENT TALK ABOUT A "GOVERNMENT
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PARTY." IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER THIS REFLECTS INDECISION AMONG GOVERNMENT LEADERS AS TO THE NEXT STEP IN THE WAKE OF THE PARTIES' RESPECTABLE SHOWING IN LOCAL ELECTIONS. MEANWHILE, CENSORSHIP OF THE OPPOSITION PRESS, PARTICULARLY ISTIQLAL ORGANS, HAS RESUMED AFTER A HIATUS DURING THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN. THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL COMMISSION HAS NOT MET SINCE NOV. 20, DESPITE CONTINUING RUMORS OF AN IMPENDING SESSION TO BE CHAIRED BY THE KING. THE ELECTION CALENDAR NOW CALLS FOR SELECTION OF PROFESSIONAL CHAMBERS, I.E., CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE, AGRICULTURE, LABOR AND HANDICRAFTS WHICH HAS BEEN RUMORED FOR JANUARY. DELEGATES CHOSEN FROM THESE CHAMBERS AND FROM THE LOCAL COUNCILS WILL CONSTITUTE AN ELECTORAL COLLEGE TO CHOOSE ONE-THIRD OF THE PARLIAMENT. THE DECREES GOVERNING THE PROFESSIONAL CHAMBERS AND THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE HAVE NOT YET BEEN ISSUED. NOT SURPRISINGLY, OPPOSITION LEADERS PREDICT THAT THEY WILL BE STACKED TO HELP PRO-GOVERNMENT CANDIDATES. THE KING ANNOUNCED WHILE IN PARIS IN NOVEMBER HIS INTENTION TO HOLD ELECTIONS IN MARCH FOR THE REMAINING TWO-THIRDS OF PARLIAMENT. THE DECREE GOVERNING THIS ELECTION SHOULD BE ISSUED 4-6 WEEKS BEFORE THE BALLOTTING DATE, AND IS EXPECTED ONCE AGAIN TO BE HEAVILY WEIGHTED TWORD RURAL AREAS. THE OPPOSITION SHOULD NEVERTHELESS HOLD ITS OWN AND PERHAPS IMPROVE ITS STANDING AS A RESULT OF PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, IN WHICH NATIONAL ISSUES MAY HAVE MORE RELEVANCE. ALSO, THE "INDEPENDENTS" SEEM TO BE FAR FROM MONLITHIC AND PROBABLY INCLUDE A FEW OPPOSITION SYMPATHIZERS.

7. PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS HELD LIKELY IN MARCH/APRIL. ALTHOUGH USFP AND PPS LEADERS PRIVATELY EXPRESS CONCERN THAT THE GOVERNMENT MAY DELAY THE NEXT PHASE OF ELECTIONS, WE SEE NO CONCRETE SIGNS TO JUSTIFY THIS CONCERN. ON THE CONTRARY, THE KING HIMSELF SEEMS

HIGHLY ENGAGED THROUGH HIS PUBLIC STATEMENTS. USFP AND PPS LEADERS ARGUE PRIVATELY THAT THE COUNTRY IS INVOLVED AS NEVER BEFORE IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS AND WARN THAT, IF THE GOVERNMENT DOES NOT GO THROUGH WITH PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, THERE WILL BE GREAT POPULAR DISAPPOINTMENT AND, PERHAPS, UNREST. THIS COULD WELL BE THE CASE.

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8. COMMENT: MOROCCO'S LATEST ELECTORAL EXPERIMENT THUS APPEARS TO BE MOVING AHEAD IN ORDERLY FASHION, DESPITE PAST FITS AND STARTS REFLECTING THE GOVERNMENT'S LONG-STANDING HESITATION AT MOVING TOWARD SHARING OF POWER. THE CONSTITUTION IN ANY CASE ASSURES THAT THE THRONE WILL RETAIN VERY BROAD POWERS EVEN WITH A FUNCTIONING PARLIAMENT, AND IT IS TOO EARLY TO FORECAST WHETHER THE CURRENT EXPERIMENT WILL IN FACT RESULT IN DEVELOPING A MEANINGFUL DEMOCRATIC BASE. THE NEXT MOVE IS, AS USUAL, UP TO THE PALACE.

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Message Attributes

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